

WINTA THE SIOUX MAIDEN

"WELL, yes, if you want it," said the old cavalry sergeant to a group of interested listeners. "I'll tell you a story. I went last night to see the play where the Indian girl falls in love with a young officer and by her heroism saves the garrison. You've seen the play?"

"Yes," his hearers assented. "Well then I'll tell you a story something like that in the play. It was just after the Kearney massacre, that is, we whites called it a massacre, but if as many Indians had been killed as there were soldiers it would have been nothing but a fight, and I say this though I have been a regular for more than 30 years. The whole country up toward what afterward was the Custer battlefield was filled with Sioux. There were old Red Cloud, he was comparatively young Red Cloud then, American Horse, and some others, all big chiefs and bad, who were on the war path with bands of young bucks, and they were burning and lifting hair whenever they got a chance.

"I was a duty sergeant in the Eleventh cavalry at the time serving with 'T' troop. With 'B' troop we had been following the trail of a bunch of reds, near the Grand river. We struck 'em unexpectedly and killed some eight or ten and lost four men ourselves. The rest of the band scattered and got away, but we made a queer capture. No Indian on the war path ever takes a squaw along with him, that is, if he's regularly on the war path, but that bunch had along with 'em the prettiest Sioux girl anyone ever laid eyes on. Indian girls ain't pretty anyway, but this one was, and you have my word for it. She wasn't more than 18 years old. A lot of our men spoke the Sioux lingo and we got her story. Her name was Winta, and she was the daughter of a Sioux chief. She had gone down Grand river way on a visit to a Sioux village that was peaceful like. Her father was a tough old warrior who hated the whites, and he was now up near the Black Hills.

"Winta said she had become homesick and that this roving band of Sioux coming along and being headed for her father's headquarters, she had asked them to take her home. Being a big chief's daughter, the braves had done as she requested.

"This was along in October and the weather was getting sharp. 'B' and 'I' had orders to go into winter quarters up Black Hills way. We knew we had to get there pretty soon and prepare things for a long, hard time of it. We didn't know what to do with the girl. We couldn't leave her, and so we took her along.

"We had a young second lieutenant with us. He was a good-looking fellow, but if I must say it he had considerable conceit. That's neither here nor there, however. Winta, the Sioux girl, was as modest a creature as any prairie flower that ever grew. She took a shine, however, to the West Point youngster, and he was mighty attentive to her, though all in a fair and square way. You can bet the old major commanding our squadron wouldn't a-had it any other way, for, you see, a woman under the protection of a bunch of soldiers is safe, be she red, white or yellow. Blake, that was the youngster's name, used to ride alongside of Winta, and he saw to it that she got the best bits of buffalo meat that the carcass afforded. She used to hang her head on one side and look at him just the way you've seen many a white girl look. They're all alike, these women.

"Well, we got up near the Black Hills some time early in November, and it was getting colder than sin. The old major looked about for a suitable place for our winter camp and found it under the shelter of some bluffs, with plenty of water close at hand. Our position was all right except that we were pretty badly open on one side in case of attack, but as a matter of fact we didn't think much of that because there were sixty odd of us and we thought we were good for all the Sioux and northern Cheyennes that were likely to come. We had the Indian girl, Winta, with us yet, and the major gave her a tent by herself. She was sweeter than a sweet still on the youngster Blake; that is, her eyes would follow him round, and she always smiled when he spoke to her, something she wouldn't do for anyone else in the outfit, though she was always polite and nice enough, Sioux fashion.

"We were running short of meat and the major sent out a hunting party into the hills with a lot of pack horses. They were gone ten days and they came back with enough grub to last us all winter, but they had a bit of news that we didn't like. They told us that not more than 15 miles off, where two creeks came together, there was a huge encampment of Indians, evidently settled for the winter. They had counted the tepee poles by the aid of glasses and figured that there must be at least 3,000 Indians in the village, which meant a fighting strength of about 800 men.

"A soldier's willin' to fight, but he can't fight long with odds of fourteen to one against him. We didn't care about going to attack the reds, and we were mighty well content if they wouldn't come to attack us.

"When Winta, the Indian girl, heard about the village she said that it was

her father's, but that he had changed his place since she last had seen him. For three weeks now Winta had been billing and cooing with young Blake, and they certainly were sweet on each other. The fellows were betting even, though such things don't happen often, that Blake would make her go back to civilization with him and that there they would be spliced up. They were two regular turtle doves.

"The day after we heard of the Indian village Winta went to the major, got down on her knees in front of him, and prayed she might be allowed to go to her father's village. The major understood Sioux. He'd been up against the devils often enough to be able to write a dictionary of their lingo.

"Why, Winta," he said, "if you go back, they'll know that somebody must have brought you most of the way, and they'll be down on us like a whirlwind."

"I'm putting the girl's talk into straight English. She said that the reason she wanted to go was to keep her father and his men from attacking us. 'I am his only child,' she said, 'and he can't refuse me anything. I'll tell him of your goodness to me and his heart will be soft. Some of the warriors will find that you are here when they rove in search of game, and then you will be attacked and killed.'

"It was about this time that young Blake came up. The girl turned a face full of love toward him. Blake blushed a little and said to the major: 'I guess Winta knows what she's about and I think she can keep these fellows quiet until spring, when we'll have some kind of a chance at them.'

"We fellows all said to one another: 'The girl's goin' to her father to keep him from getting after us just for the sake of the youngster. She don't care a rap for all our kindness, but she does just dote on Blake.'

"Well, the upshot of it was that the major let the girl go. It was only a matter of 15 miles, and she had the



HUGE ENCAMPMENT OF INDIANS.

same pony that she rode when we captured her. Winta and Blake had a tearful parting. 'My father's people shall protect you,' she said. Then she rode away just at reveille on that bright November morning.

"Just at gray of the day the following morning the rifles of our two outposts on our exposed side rang out, and then rang out again. Then came an alarm from the guard, and inside of a minute every trooper in the camp was in the little redoubt which we had constructed on our exposed side. Out of the half darkness there came a thundering horde of warriors. We met them with a volley and then with another, crash, crash, crash. They went hurtling back, but we knew it was only to come again. We held them off, and it became broad daylight. They swept down on us time after time. I never saw Indians come like that before, over the open against an entrenched foe.

"Well, the providential happened. The rest of the Eleventh had been ordered to join us in winter quarters. They came just in time. The reds went off like the wind with our comrades and us after them. We got two or three long range volleys before they got into the hills and escaped.

"We picked up a lot of wounded, and what do you think? One of them was Winta. She had betrayed us, and she was dying. Blake looked at her as she looked at him. 'Why did you do it?' he asked.

"The girl looked him in the eye. 'Because I hate you and all whites,' she said."

"Well, sergeant," broke in one of his auditors, "that ain't like stage stories. In them the Indian girl always saves her soldier lover."

"I know it," said the sergeant, "but if you'll show me a play with a soldier or an Indian in it that's anything like real life I'll show you six white black birds."—Chicago Record-Herald.

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